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SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE

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TAGS: KFRD CVIS CPAS CMGT LA
SUBJECT: VIENTIANE FRAUD SUMMARY: Q4 FY 2007

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A. (U) The Lao People's Democratic Republic is a poor, least-developed country with a single-party communist government. The Hmong are the second largest ethnic minority in Laos, accounting for almost 10% of the total population, but comprise an estimated 25% to 30% of our visa applicants.

With an estimated \$572 per capita income, Laos is one of the poorest countries in East Asia. Nearly 71% of the population lives on less than \$2 a day, with 23% living on less than \$1 per day. Illiteracy is about 47%. Agriculture is the major sector of the economy, contributing 46% of the GDP and employing approximately 79% of the population, mostly in subsistence farming. Poverty and a totalitarian government are main contributors to fraud in Laos, as citizens attempt to illegally emigrate permanently, or temporarily work illegally in the United States.

The ethnic Lao population in the U.S., which is large relative to the Lao national population, is also a draw for illegal immigration as families attempt to reunite in the United States. The most recent U.S. census estimated that 170,000 ethnic Lao and 170,000 ethnic Hmong currently live in the United States. The ethnic Hmong population in the US is equal to almost 30% of the ethnic Hmong population in Laos.

Passports and national ID cards are the only nationally issued forms of identification, but the information on a Lao passport or ID card cannot be accepted at face value. False or duplicate identities are common among visa applicants. Obtaining a passport issued with a false identity is relatively easy, in many cases not even requiring a bribe. Laos does not have a well-established tradition of civil documents, and, as such, there is little standardization or security for documents such as birth or marriage certificates. Additionally, many of these documents are issued at the village level by the village chief, and, as such, will say generally whatever the requestor wants them to say. Many documents submitted to the Consular Section in support of an application for any service are hand written. Further, forged or false business licenses, bank books, identity cards, and household registration books are common. Detection of altered or fraudulent documents is usually easy as production is unsophisticated.

B. (U) NIV Fraud. Nothing new to report.

C. (U) IV Fraud: Fiance (K1) Visas. During the reporting period, Conoffs interviewed several female Hmong K1 applicants who stated that they had been interviewed in Laos on videotape by unnamed Hmong men during the traditional Hmong New Year celebration (usually mid

to late November through early December). With the assistance of a Congressional office in Minnesota, we obtained a copy of one of these tapes that was for sale in an Asian supermarket in Minneapolis. The tape is titled, "Hmong Girls are Waiting for You," apparently an annual match-making video production. The tape consists of poor quality camerawork of a few people walking around at the previous year's Hmong Ethnic New Year festivals and filming random young women, asking their names and what village they were from. Some of the women provide contact phone numbers. We have begun to collect these names for comparison with pending and future applications. Among the many fraud indicators in these cases are altered household registrations and/or birth certificates. The applicant's year of birth is usually changed to make her appear older. In at least one case, an applicant has admitted to being under 14 years old when meeting the petitioner but documents presented stated she was 18. This case has been referred to the ICE office in Bangkok for further investigation.

D. (SBU) DV Fraud: All of the six 2007 DV winners who presented documents for interview were assisted by a Lao-American woman who resides in Omaha, NE. The woman had not only assisted them with the initial applications for the lottery but also filled out the visa application forms, providing her home address as the U.S. mailing address. A majority of the applicants presented clearly fraudulent documents to demonstrate educational qualifications and were unable to demonstrate bona fides to prove their claimed spousal relationships, all of which reportedly began after the principal applicant was selected for the DV lottery.

The broker traveled to Vientiane to resolve the pending cases in September. During an interview with a DV applicant, she was seen discussing unknown matters with several other visa applicants in the waiting room. She and the DV applicants frenetically disrupted the flow of other NIV and IV processing, interrupting several interviews. One of her clients refused to accept the refusal of her

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visa application, tracked down post's senior IV LES, and went to his house on two occasions accompanied by the broker. The applicant attempted to bribe the LES and enlist his assistance with getting her refusal overcome. The applicant continued to call the LES employee on his private cell phone many times. He diligently reported this to the Consular chief and assisted in an investigation.

During an interview with the RSO and the Consular chief, the broker claimed to be religiously motivated by a vision to assist as many people to emigrate to the U.S. as possible. She claims she has been assisting person with the Diversity Visa process since 2005, processing 200 to 300 applications each year. Being a full time tailor, she enlisted her seven children to assist in the online applications and paperwork processing. She claims this is all without a fee, although she pays her children in the U.S. for assisting her with data entry for the applications. Upon arrival, the beneficiaries supposedly stay with her until they can make their own living arrangements. She claims that for the 2008 DV cycle she has 4 winners in Laos and 1 in Thailand.

The RSO and Consul have informed the broker that she is barred from all future contact with any consular employee in the visa unit.

E. (U) ACS and Passport Fraud: Nothing new to report.

F. (SBU) Adoption Fraud. During the reporting period, the Consular Chief spoke on several occasions with a U.S. citizen woman who stated she is a representative of a U.S.-based non-profit church group called Unreached Villages (see <http://unreachedvillages.org>). She claims that she arrived in Laos in February 2007 with her husband and several children and had been "given" a Lao infant by an unnamed Lao woman, who she claims told her would "throw the baby in the Mekong River" if she did not take the child. The US citizen woman has filed a formal adoption application for the baby with the Office of the Prime Minister, and stated she would file an I-600 Visa petition for the child with the USCIS office in Portland, Oregon. She further stated that Unreached Villages hopes to open an orphanage in Laos in the near future. While we do not doubt the

sincerity of this woman or this organization in their efforts to assist Lao children, we are concerned about the circumstances around the claimed incident with the child that this woman claims she is adopting and will monitor any future cases brought to our attention closely.

IG. (U) Asylum and other DHS Benefit Fraud: Nothing new to report.

IH. (U) Cooperation with the Authorities: The Consular Chief meets regularly with his working level counterpart at the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss Lao passport fraud. The Visa Unit confiscates duplicate identity passports detected during the visa interview process by the IDENT system and returns them to MFA with biodata on the applicants and their claimed identities.

II. Areas of Particular Concern: Nothing new to report.

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